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China Sentences Prominent Editor As Spy for U.S.

By Michael Weisskopf
Washington Post Foreign Service

PEKING, May 15—The editor in chief of a Chinese Communist newspaper in Hong Kong has been sentenced here to 10 years in prison on charges of spying for the United States.

The state-run New China News Agency reported today that Lo Cheng-hsun, 62, was convicted of supplying "important secret information" on China's political, diplomatic and military affairs to an unidentified U.S. intelligence agency in exchange for "regular subsidies."

The report gave no details of the charges against Lo, who has been under house arrest here for a year, but it said he pleaded guilty and waived his right to appeal the sentence. In China, virtually all information is considered a "state secret" until published in the official press.

U.S. officials here and in Hong Kong said they have no direct knowledge of the case. But they denied any U.S. espionage link to the prominent journalist.

[The State Department said it had no comment on the case.]

Although other Chinese officials have been jailed in recent months for divulging confidential materials to foreigners, Lo is the first

to be accused of having an illicit U.S. intelligence connection.

His conviction coincides with Peking's rising anger over U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, trade disputes and the political asylum granted to China's leading female tennis player.

"It probably reflects views among Chinese leaders that despite protestations of friendship, the United States still looks on China as an enemy," said a western envoy.

Other foreign analysts said Lo is innocent and is being used as a symbol of the Communist regime's crackdown on unauthorized Chinese contacts with foreigners.

Lo, a Communist Party member known in Hong Kong as Lo Fu, headed the New Evening Post, one of three Peking-controlled newspapers in the British colony. As a daily columnist, he was regarded as an influential Communist spokesman whose views were sought by foreign diplomats and China watchers.

Since he was recalled to Peking and placed under house arrest about a year ago, leftist magazines in Hong Kong have accused Lo of divulging Chinese secrets in return for large cash payments covered by the sale of paintings.

Other Hong Kong leftists claimed he was the victim of party squabbling and framed because of his occasionally unorthodox views.

Deputy Managing Editor De Cheng of the New Evening Post referred a reporter to the New China News Agency story when asked by telephone for further details on the case. The brief news agency account said Lo was convicted by the Peking intermediate people's court, which concluded he had become a U.S. spy several years ago. No details of his alleged activities were reported.

Peking began clamping down on unauthorized meetings between Chinese and foreigners about 18 months ago, warning that the country was full of spies and enemies out to disrupt China.

Intense scrutiny since then has been focused on Chinese journalists and officials who maintain regular contacts with foreign reporters and diplomats.

Last May, Li Guangyi, chief ed-

itor of the China Finance and Trade Journal, was imprisoned for five years on charges of leaking confidential political information to a foreigner. According to sources here, he was accused of telling a Japanese journalist such secret details as the time, place and agenda of a key Communist Party meeting.

Li, 65, was convicted under a statute providing penalties of up to seven years in prison for "any state functionary who betrays an important secret of the state in violation of security regulations."

In December, a Canton official who dealt with overseas Chinese in his job was convicted under the same espionage law that snared Lo.

The statute provides a minimum sentence of 10 years' imprisonment for anyone convicted of "stealing, spying and supplying information to the enemy."

The Canton man, Dai Zhen, was sentenced to 12 years on charges of "stealing and selling" secrets to the Hong Kong magazine Cheng Ming. He allegedly wrote articles himself under a pen-name and provided the journal's editor with details of internal party meetings and speeches by leading officials.

Cheng Ming said it paid Dai Zhen \$80 monthly for his work as a "contributing editor." The magazine claimed his offerings contained no confidential information.